

BEST COPY

AVAILABLE

25 YEAR RE-REVIEW

Browne Tells of Days as Prisoner of Castro

Former Milwaukeeean Says Cubans Took His Skin Divers for CIA Agents

By RAYMOND E. McBRIDE
of the Journal Staff

"I'm going back to the islands."

Jack Browne, the skin diver and former Milwaukeeean who was released Tuesday in Cuba with eight other shipwrecked American divers, hastened to add that he did not mean Cuba, however, but the Bahamas.

Browne was interviewed by telephone on his return by plane to Miami, Fla., after nearly two months imprisonment in Cuba. He had tried to avoid reporters in Miami because of his physical condition.

"I lost 30 to 35 pounds," Browne said. "They didn't deliberately try to starve us. They fed us by Cuban standards—rice and beans. But it certainly wasn't American style cooking."

Tells of Guns

Asked if he was threatened with death, Browne said laconically:

"Sure — all the time. Every time they talked to us there were guns pointing at us. They kept trying to make CIA agents out of us."

Browne paused and added sarcastically:

"That's their first love—the CIA." (The CIA is the United States central intelligence agency.)

"The Cubans figured right away that we were CIA agents," Browne said. "Anyone arriving in Cuba goes to G-2 (intelligence). We were taken to the G-2 headquarters in Havana in cars."

"They tried to convert my boys to communism. Actually they worked on the younger fellows more than on me."

"We were kept in individual cells. There were no windows, just louvered doors."

Treatment Improves

Browne said that in the last three weeks the group lived in one cell and was given better treatment. He credited the improvement to efforts on their behalf by James B. Donovan,

the New York lawyer who negotiated with Prime Minister Castro for their release.

The nine Americans, headed by Browne, sailed from Florida in January on what they variously described as a fishing, scuba

lobstering, skin diving and treasure hunting expedition after his 45th birthday. That was to carry them as far east as the Dominican Republic.

Their converted buoy tender, wife had moved into a better

115 foot Shrub, lost its rudder

off the Bahamas and later

sank. Browne, his partner

Robert C. Moran of Rockport,

N. Y., and their seven crew

men bumped into a 26 foot tall

boat and drifted four days

till they washed ashore near

Camaguey, 300 miles southeast

of Havana.

Suspicious Looking

"We were lucky we weren't shot to death as we walked up that beach," Browne said. "We certainly were a suspicious looking bunch. Some of our

men had been diving, trying to

fix the ship's rudder, the day

she went down. They were still

in their rubber diving suits

when we reached Cuba.

"We had no choice but to drift toward Cuba because of

the wind's direction. We took

provisional sail from a piece

of wood."

Browne recalled that he had

been a prisoner of the Castro

government in 1960. Then he

was held for six weeks after

hurricane Donna. He said:

"I was in Cuba trying to get repairs for an 87-foot vessel the day the United States government put an embargo on Cuba. They seized the boat and told me have it."

In the telephone interview, he talked in the offhand manner of a veteran adventurer.

"I figured Donovan was near this morning. A guard offered me coffee at 4 o'clock and I figured something was up."

Will Return to Islands

Browne reiterated: "We're going back to the islands where we get squared away."

Earlier, Browne had let his partner, Moran, talk to newspapermen. Browne seemed more naked than the others, the Associated Press and United Press International reported.

Browne blinked often.

Browne was dressed in a velveteen shirt and gray trousers.

Browne came back on the day of his 45th birthday. He was

that was to carry them as far east as the Dominican Republic.

By the time Browne and his

wife had moved into a better

115 foot Shrub, lost its rudder

off the Bahamas and later

sank, Browne, his partner

Robert C. Moran of Rockport,

N. Y., and their seven crew

men bumped into a 26 foot tall

boat and drifted four days

till they washed ashore near

Camaguey, 300 miles southeast

of Havana.

On the Telephone

On the telephone, he strayed from his story to ask about Milwaukee.

"I haven't been there for about five years," he said. "My mother and two brothers live there, you know."

They are Mrs. Mrs. Browne,

2550 N. Lake Dr.; Barney Oldfield Browne, 2313 W. Dunwoodie Rd., Glendale, and William M., who lives with his

mother.

Started Diving Here

Browne inquired about several persons in Milwaukee whom he knew. He started his diving

activities here when he was

only a boy.

Browne's wife's reaction to

his return was:

"This time I'm going to chain

him to the bedpost."

At the press conference,

Browne sat quietly with his arm around his wife while Moran talked.

Stolen Boat Story

The nine men drifted in the gulf boat for five days.

Sharks Chased Us

It was heavy but every time we tried to make repairs the sharks came around and chased us out of the water."

On the evening of the fifth day the boat drifted ashore at a lighthouse near Morris, Cuba. There the men were met by two Cuban coast patrolmen armed with rifles.

They were taken to the lighthouse, fed and were given shelter until morning. Two days later, however, Castro's secret police came for them and took them to Havana, where they spent the next 13 days in solitary confinement.

In that period each man was interrogated every day and each was accused of being a spy for the United States.